

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services**



**Office of the Director**

**Testimony of**  
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Committee on Human Services  
Public Oversight Roundtable on  
“The Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services  
Lead Entities/Service Coalition Grants”  
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Good morning, Chairman Wells and members of the Committee. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you at this public roundtable to discuss DYRS’s Lead Entity/Service Coalition Initiative.

The Lead Entity/Service Coalition Initiative has been crafted in collaboration with the community, youth and family organizations, and philanthropic community over the past several years. We have partnered with the DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation and two selected lead community-based organizations with the aim of helping young people who are involved with the juvenile justice system become more productive citizens by building on their strengths in the least restrictive environment consistent with public safety. Our goal is to create the nation’s best continuum of care for these youth and families through this neighborhood-based and neighborhood empowering program that emphasizes individual strengths, personal accountability, skill development, positive family interaction and support, and community involvement in the process.

I am pleased today to announce publicly that the selected Lead Entity for Wards One through Six (Region II) is Progressive Life Center, Inc. and the Lead Entity for Wards Seven and Eight is the East of the River Clergy Police Community Partnership (Region I). DYRS is very pleased with these selections and the process through which they were chosen. Both organizations are well-respected and invested in the communities that they will be serving, and both have engaged in an inclusive process that has coalesced more than 30 community-based organizations as part of their Service Coalition. Before detailing the process for these selections, let me first set the historical context and impetus for moving our juvenile justice system in this direction.

#### History and Rationale:

Since becoming a cabinet-level agency in 2005, the mission of the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services has been to improve public safety by building on the strengths of the young people in our care in the least restrictive environment consistent with public safety. Our goal is to dramatically improve our continuum of care, thereby making our neighborhoods safer and engaging young people and their families in the process of turning their lives around. Moreover, our vision has consistently been to achieve this goal by creating decent and rehabilitative secure care *and* to develop a continuum of community-based care for youth under our supervision that is second to none in the nation.

Earlier in this decade, the Blue Ribbon Commission on Youth Safety and Juvenile Justice Reform noted in its policy recommendations that community-based alternatives to confinement are desperately needed:

*Recognizing that youth should be held accountable for antisocial behavior, there are many youth who have been committed for offenses for which they might be better served in community-based settings. This is a challenge,*

*given the media glorification of the urban “super-predator” and community backlash against such proposals. However, the Commission recognizes that community-based supports are the ideal and that public and elected officials, advocates, and experts need to partner in their efforts to educate the public at-large about the benefits observed in other jurisdictions. There are many unrealized opportunities to promote rehabilitation of youth through the use of home and community-based supports.*

Notwithstanding the challenges of this kind of revamping of our community services and supports, DYRS has moved forward to do what is in the best interests of youth in our care and under our supervision consistent with public safety. Thus, we focused our attention on conceptualizing, designing, and implementing a seamless continuum and network of community-based, youth- and family-focused, asset-based services, supports, and opportunities either in lieu of secure confinement or as aftercare supporting a youth’s re-entry into the community following residential treatment or secure confinement.

To help us inform and reform the community-based operations, DYRS contracted with the Center for Community Empowerment (CCE). CCE, over a three-month period in 2005, engaged a cross-section of community stakeholders and interagency representatives in a planning process to guide and inform the development of the DYRS community-based continuum of care. These stakeholders constituted the CCE Design Team. The Design Team recommended that DYRS implement a decentralized and regionalized service system that would support youth as much as possible within their own families and neighborhoods through a collaborative effort between DYRS staff and community-based lead agencies. The stakeholders’ recommendation for a Lead Entity/Service Coalition was rooted in the premise that for successful interventions to occur, communities

should have ownership in and be engaged in resolving problems that exist within their own communities.

Research supports this premise in that youth from disjointed neighborhoods end up in the juvenile justice systems at higher rates than youth from more organized communities. Ironically, research also shows that incarcerating large numbers of people from neighborhoods further destabilizes those neighborhoods.

DYRS and CCE looked at the nationally-recognized “Wraparound Milwaukee” approach, as well as regionalization efforts in Wayne County (Detroit), Michigan to develop and implement a Lead Entity/Service Coalition concept as the means to reform our service delivery approach to committed youth.

Stakeholders believed, and DYRS agreed, that by building the capacity of DC’s communities to work with their own court-involved youth, this model would go a long way towards helping to rebuild fragmented communities and involve young people and their families in community development, thereby improving their opportunity for success. Equally powerful is the economic empowerment inherent in this concept. Through it, we are infusing communities with the necessary financial, training, and technical assistance resources to develop appropriate services, supports, and opportunities for their own youth most in need of positive options and alternatives in their lives.

Likewise, DYRS firmly believes that the Government alone cannot sufficiently impact the lives of youth and families in our care. The Government must partner with families and communities to provide services, supports, and opportunities. Youth will achieve better outcomes with the support of their families whenever possible and when they are primarily served in the communities in which they live by individuals, providers, civic, community- and faith-based organizations vested in those same communities. This profound shift represents a decentralized,

regionalized, and neighborhood approach in the responsibility for service provision for DYRS youth and their families, as well as for providers.

Partnership with the Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation:

Since DYRS does not have grant-making authority and has for a long time been viewed as a centralized bureaucracy, a search for a partner to serve as a bridge to the community and help to administer the fiscal responsibilities inherent in awarding grants was necessary. We explored the traditional ways that the government provides funding to community-based organizations.

First, DYRS met with the Office of Contracting and Procurement (OCP) and, after many strategic meetings, it became clear that the uniqueness of the Lead Entity model did not lend itself to a standard contractual agreement and was beyond the scope of OCP. OCP recommended a grant as the appropriate funding vehicle. DYRS and OCP agreed that a grant would allow DYRS to develop the kind of partnership with the community-based organizations that we wanted to achieve, and provide the level of flexibility and creativity that is difficult if not impossible in a standard grant relationship. Together with our Youth Family Team Meeting approach to developing and revising case plans, DYRS believes that the grant approach to funding the Regionalized Service Coalitions will allow strong government oversight to the services being provided to our youth, along with a rapid and nimble response to case adjustments and wraparound services that one is rarely able to find in typical, government-driven contractual relationships.

Second, we held numerous meetings with our sister agency, the Department of Mental Health (DMH). DMH graciously offered to partner with DYRS on this Initiative and to utilize their grant-making authority to issue grants to the community. However, the Office of the City Administrator thought there was a

better local partner created to provide, among other things, a grant-making mechanism to community-based organizations and recommended that DYRS partner with the DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation (hereinafter referred to as the Trust). The Trust is a public-private partnership whose mission is to support and develop the highest quality programs to encourage innovation in services and organizations and to ensure that money invested is spent wisely through clearly defined and sustainable programs. Since its establishment in 1999[District of Columbia Nonprofit Corporation Act, Title 29, Chapter 5 of the Code of Law of the District of Columbia], the Trust has been the primary resource for developing partnerships that expand and improve services and opportunities for children and youth in the District of Columbia, especially during their time out of school. The partnerships include District Government Agencies, for example, DYRS, DCPS, DHS, DOH, DMH, OSSE and DME as well as non-profit providers and private funders.

DYRS felt that the Trust brought the following assets to the table in the partnership we were developing with them:

1. The Trust utilizes a positive youth development/asset based approach to addressing challenges in the community, meshing well with DYRS' Positive Youth Development approach to working with youth in our care
2. The Trust already has strong, established relationships with large and small community providers working with youth that would be a strength in our partnering with them
3. The Trust, in partnership with the Lead Entities/Service Coalitions, would provide the kind of flexibility and creativity we were seeking, coupled with strong fiscal oversight, and
4. The Trust has expertise in managing grant competitions and the grants awarded to community-based organizations in the city.

After a series of thorough discussions and negotiations, the two organizations entered into a formal agreement (MOU) for joint administration and oversight in November 2008. During this time, as you may recall, I referred to our relationship with the Trust in briefings to your office and in hearings before this committee so as to keep the Council informed as to our new Lead Entity approach and relationship with the Trust. As a result of this partnership, the Lead Entities are grantees of the Trust *and* DYRS, and the MOU outlines the respective programmatic and fiscal relationships and responsibilities of our organizations that will support the Lead Entities through their start-up phase and on-going operations. The Trust will provide financial oversight and DYRS will provide programmatic oversight over this Initiative.

#### Operational Definitions:

DYRS decided that in order to order to cover the city with an array of community-based resources, and make those resources more relevant to the local flavor of the youths' neighborhoods, we would need two Lead Entities: one to service Wards One through Six and one to service Wards Seven and Eight. The Lead Entity designs, organizes, develops, and manages a continuum of community-based services through a Service Coalition. Thus, Lead Entities of the Service Coalitions will be able to:

- Serve committed youth within their own communities through the concentration of resources in or near the youths' communities
- Provide continuity and connectivity across a continuum of care for youth
- Facilitate and enable greater parent, family, and community involvement in the rehabilitation process
- Develop a strategy for assessing the assets of individual youth and their family members and develop a well-structured means for the exchange of these assets among the recipients of the service coalition's services and supports

- Mobilize untapped neighborhood resources that could be networked effectively into an ongoing system of services, supports, and opportunities
- Strengthen the capacity of local neighborhoods, grassroots organizations, and residents to serve as effective partners with local government in supporting committed youth beyond their involvement in the juvenile justice system
- Increase emphasis on developing and assisting youth in their transition to become productive adults
- Target District resources and mobilize local volunteer support
- Significantly reduce recidivism rates, and
- Ensure a more individualized and consensus-driven service delivery model to meet the needs of youth and families.

Decentralized and regionalized service delivery systems will support youth as much as possible within their own families and own neighborhoods. The relationships that are established between and among community-based providers and individuals within a designated Service Coalition will result in increased monitoring of and support for families of youth involved in the juvenile justice system that will translate into increased community and neighborhood responsibility for these youth and families. Creating and nurturing this sense of shared responsibility and accountability for youth and their families can no longer rest solely with a single case manager or government agency; but must become a shared responsibility of DYRS in partnership with the community through the Lead Entity/Service Coalition model.

#### Overview of Recruitment/RFP Process:

As early as December 2007, community outreach, involvement, education, and even training for potential applications were initiated. There were informational community meetings, presentations to the executive branch, sister agencies,



foundations, and the *Jerry M.* Arbiter and Plaintiffs' Counsel. DYRS held two meetings to obtain input in late 2007 as we were developing a Scope of Work for the Lead Entities; then worked collaboratively with the Trust to host three trainings conducted by national experts to expand the capacity of community based organizations, as well as two Grant Technical Assistance/Bidders Conferences to of community-based organizations further explain the RFP requirements to organizations interested in applying for lead entity designation as they prepared to respond to the RFP and network with other groups. And, Mayor Fenty convened a press conference to generate media coverage, thus ensuring high visibility for this Initiative.

In November 2008, the Trust issued the Request for Proposals (RFP) to identify two community-based organizations with the qualifications and capabilities to serve as Lead Entities. The application process closed in February 2009, and there were 11 Lead Entity applicants.

Two of the 11 applicants were disqualified for submitting incomplete applications. The remaining nine applications were given a thorough review for completion and compliance with the RFP requirements by a Review Panel. The reviewers were selected based on a familiarity with DYRS process, knowledge of the District and the Wards where Lead Entities would provide oversight, experience working with adjudicated youth, grant-making, and positive youth development. The Review Panel reviewed, scored, and ranked each proposal. Upon completion of its review, the Review Panel made recommendations to DYRS for awards based on the scoring process. DYRS, as stated in the RFP, had the final decision-making authority.

We were also very intentional about ensuring that the review panels were composed of a diverse and community-oriented group. In fact, four of the

reviewers were parents of DYRS youth recommended by a parent advocacy organization. Additionally, the review panel consisted of representatives from the foundation community, a DC Superior Court Judge, a PDS attorney, a juvenile justice expert, civic leaders, and one representative each from the Trust and DYRS. Upon completion of its review, the panel made recommendations for awards based on the scoring process.

The goal was to ensure that the Lead Entity selection process went beyond the standard review of the written proposal. We did not want the final decisions to be based purely upon which organization was able to hire the best grant writer. We wanted to be sure that the selected organizations had deep roots in the District, understood our systems, and were invested and committed to the communities that they would be serving. The process was lengthy, thorough, and labor intensive. But I am happy to say that the commitment to this Initiative is evident in the final selection and we are certainly in the formative stages of developing an unprecedented partnership with the community partners that serve our youth and families.

I have included a timeline that shows that the work on this Initiative dating back to 2005. Interestingly, with all of the work that has already been done, the real work is just beginning with the start-up of the Leads and the transition into this Initiative.

#### Funding:

DYRS has secured over \$500,000 in support for the Lead Entity concept from DC area foundations and the ***Jerry M.*** fine fund based upon a recommendation of the Plaintiffs and Special Arbiter. The balance of the funding required during year one of the Lead Entity operation will be covered by utilizing appropriated dollars. The Trust will award two 18 month grants ranging from \$2,875,000 to \$3,875,000 during the initial grant period. In years two through five, funding for the DYRS

Lead Entities will range from \$5,800,000 to \$7,500,000. The grants require a 3% cash match from the each Lead Entity. Each Lead Entity has provided proof and documentation of the 3% cash match placed in an interest-bearing account designated solely for the purpose of the Initiative.

The foundation funding will be used in part to provide training for the two Leads. We recognized that whichever Leads were selected, there would be some areas of their organizations and staff that would benefit from training opportunities. We are working with the Trust and the Leads to develop and offer individualized training opportunities for the Lead Entities and their Coalitions following a thorough assessment of the organization's capacity.

#### Sixty-Day Start-Up Phase:

The 60-day start-up phase began on September 15, 2009 and has been paid through the foundation and **Jerry M.** Fine Fund dollars provided for this Initiative. Each Lead Entity has a 60-day work plan that will require completed start-up activities including formal finalized agreements with coalition members, training for Lead Entity and Service Coalition staff and developed and documented policies and procedures.

During this start-up phase, DYRS will be facilitating transition Youth Family Team Meetings (YFTM) for *all* youth in our care and in the community. The YFTM's will join the Lead Entity with our youth and families in a productive discussion about the current engagement of the youth and possibilities through the coalitions.

The implementation of the Regional Service Coalitions will simultaneously enhance DYRS' case management of committed youth. The Leads will have Care Managers who engage youth and families and also ensure appropriate services are in place. The Leads will participate in the case planning and processing of youth

from the pre-commitment stage through the completion of their commitment to DYRS.

The Regional Service Coalition members providing direct services will maintain contact and partnership with the DYRS case managers and social workers. DYRS Case Management will continue to provide supervision and direction over all youth committed to the agency. Case managers and social workers will have much more support through this process but will continue to be tasked with frequent contact with youth, ensuring appropriate services are in place, and are the primary staff responsible for the youth committed to DYRS.

The implementation of the Regional Service Coalitions will streamline the service referral process and provide for more intense supervision, engagement, and contact with committed youth. As the Service Coalitions start up, DYRS staff will go through joint training with them, emphasizing our Positive Youth Development approach, but now with a much more robust range of opportunities for our youth to turn their lives around. We believe this will provide a much needed boost to case workers seeking a broader range of services and supports for the youth in their care, and joint training will assure that the new approach starts off with significant staff familiarity and buy-in.

#### Evaluation:

How will we know if we are achieving planned outcomes? How will we ensure fidelity to the concept and public accountability? The DYRS Office of Research and Quality Assurance (ORQA) will be primarily responsible for working with each Lead Entity and its Service Coalition in the evaluation of the DYRS Lead Entity Initiative approach. Members of our QA staff met with evaluators from Wayne County, Michigan and have reviewed their outcome analyses prior to

developing DYRS' system for evaluating our Regionalized Service Coalition approach. The QA evaluation will consist of the systematic collection of information about the activities and outcomes of the Service Coalitions to allow for informed data-driven judgments about Service Coalition effectiveness and youth improvements as well as decisions about future programming. The DYRS evaluation of the Service Coalitions will serve three primary purposes: 1) program planning, 2) program development, and 3) program accountability. DYRS and the Trust will measure and monitor the grantee's performance as well as youth/family outcomes against established key indicators.

Leading researchers in the juvenile justice field, Jeffrey Butts and Aundra Saa Meroe, have just concluded a report entitled, ***Establishing a Framework for Juvenile Justice reform Based on the Concepts of Positive Youth Development*** that was commissioned by DYRS utilizing funds from the JEHT Foundation. Based on their review of the relevant literature, the authors recommended a focus on seven key areas that DYRS is seeking to infuse into our reform efforts to improve secure care, create a system of accountability, and provide an environment that helps our youth to reduce delinquent behavior, become more productive citizens, achieve, and flourish.

DYRS has added an additional domain: public safety. Therefore, the following eight key areas, or domains, will be integral to the evaluative process, many of which coincide with our Agency Performance Plan:

1. Social attachment and belonging: Ensuring that youth have direct and lasting experiences with positive social relationships and that they feel a deeper sense of belonging with their peers, families, and communities.

2. Work and employment: The most successful work-related programs for youth must operate within an explicit youth development orientation and focus on strong

social bonds for youth that ensure consistent and enduring relationships between youth and staff as well as between youth and their peers. We will be deploying a \$3 million Department of Labor Grant that DYRS has received to assist us in our efforts to have every youth committed to DYRS gain a workforce development experience, either paid work, internships, or job shadowing opportunities, while they are in our care.

3. Skill acquisition and organized activities: When youth are exposed to the positive supports available within organized activities that emphasize self-esteem, character-building, positive relationships with adults and peers, and positive asset development, they are less likely to be involved in criminal activity and other risky behaviors.

4. Education and opportunities for learning: No matter their level of academic ability or performance, keeping youth engaged in school and school-related activities promotes their self-development and their relationship with the larger community.

5. Civic engagement: Within each Service Coalition, there must be ample opportunities for youth to participate in decisions affecting their lives directly, to engage with other youth and pro-social adults, to empower themselves, and to engage in the civic affair of the community.

6. Creative expression and the arts: Arts programming has great promise as an intervention model for young offenders, but there are still too few studies to draw firm conclusions about the impact of arts-based programs on youth involved in the juvenile justice system. We are hopeful that our Lead Entity/Service Coalition approach will inform the research in this area.

7. Physical activity: Physical activity can be a positive contribution to youth development, but it can also lead to negative experiences with sports, including violence, aggression, and emotional abuse. That is why it is critical that our Service Coalitions have trained coaches and physical education staff because physical activity for delinquent youth must be managed appropriately to be successful.

8. Public Safety: Of course the goal of the Regionalized Service Coalition approach and infusing PYD into the services, supports, and opportunities afforded youth is to protect the public and the youth themselves from harm. Therefore an eighth domain, if you will, is Public Safety. DYRS will report on the rate of petitions for new cases to DC Superior Court and convictions for a new offense. We will also report on youth killed while under the care of the LEs.

DYRS, the Trust, and the Lead Entities have formed an Outcomes Subcommittee that has created and agreed to indicators for each of these domains. Additionally, Dr. Butts provided on-site technical assistance in a meeting held just this past Monday (September 21) to establish performance standards and data collection methodologies for the indicators. Further, the Vera Institute of Justice has received a grant from the Justice Grants Administration to assist DYRS with this process through technical assistance and research. Their work will begin after October 1, 2009. It's also my understanding that your office has retained a consultant to review the accountability processes of the contract and that your consultant has already offered substantive input into the outcome measures under development, a partnership with Council which we welcome.

Further, DYRS and the Trust are coordinating our two agencies' technological infrastructure to ensure the interface between our respective data-collection systems to document youth profiles and outcomes and to facilitate communications for the multiple entities engaged in this Initiative.

Conclusion:

I believe that the creation of these Lead Entities/Service Coalitions is the single most important reform enacted during my tenure as DYRS Director. As I stated earlier in my testimony and as was also articulated by the Blue Ribbon Commission, this reform effort – like most efforts involving change, paradigm shifts, and a different way of doing business – bears with it certain challenges. Yet, this systemic reform, as well as our other reform efforts, represents the mandate given to me upon my confirmation as Director to make DYRS a national model for others to emulate. DYRS is committed to this approach, which represents a watershed reform to greatly enhance the provision of services, supports, and opportunities to youth committed to our care and their families, and to empower the communities in which they reside, and ultimately to create safer communities in the District of Columbia. And, although this Initiative is now planned for five years, I envision that it will become institutionalized as a way of life for how our communities support their young people most in need of a second chance to turn their lives around.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to your questions.